

FirstNews

DECEMBER 2023

Beyond the Pantry Shelves FPC MEMBERS RISE AGAINST FOOD INSECURITY

Located on the lower level of First Presbyterian's Poplar Street building, a ministry dedicated to feeding hungry neighbors in our community has operated for 39 years. The Loaves and Fishes Pantry at FPC is run almost exclusively by 85 volunteers, and a bit of help from FPC staff. Volunteers stock the shelves, receive warehouse deliveries, weigh in donations, and assist nearly 300 families per month.

This year, the Loaves and Fishes network has served a record number of hungry neighbors; meanwhile, this year also saw a significant reduction in food donations throughout the county.



"Luckily, at First Presbyterian Church, we have some very generous people who have organized food collections for us," Diane Carey, Ministry Team Leader for Loaves and Fishes at FPC, shared. "In November, food drives were hosted by Dan and Martha Ogburn, Robbie Kirk, and Trinity Episcopal School. In addition,

many people donate food individually, bringing it to the pantry or dropping it off anonymously at the church."



FPC member Dan Ogburn explained how he and his wife Martha encouraged their neighbors to get involved. "There are 60 homes in our neighborhood, so we put a flyer in each mailbox, had one posted at the entrance, and had an announcement in the community newsletter. Forty of the 60 homes contributed! We were so proud of our neighbors' thoughtfulness and generosity and delighted to deliver the food – in two trips of my fully-loaded truck – to our church's food pantry, which was out the door busy both times!"

For some, collecting goods is a family affair. With his children's help, Robbie Kirk delivered a collection gathered from his place of employment, STV, Inc. Smiling ear to ear, the children proudly unloaded the food on a Wednesday night before choir practice. Firsthand experience like this can help kids develop empathy, compassion, and an understanding of the impact of their actions on others.

At Trinity Episcopal School, Lindsey Peery coordinates food drives for the students and their families to participate in. "In last year's food drive, we collected over 500 pounds. Our goal is 700 pounds

this year!"

Lindsey shared that the students love helping stock the pantry, and after blessing the collection in chapel on a Friday morning last month, a group of students and chaperones arrived to deliver the food and stock the shelves. After weigh-in, they learned they had collected 834 pounds – well above their goal.

"Without donations like these, our pantry would be very short on food to fill our customers' shopping carts," Diane revealed. Between inflated food costs and the end of the SNAP program, the need for food is higher than ever.

Anyone can make a positive impact with little time or effort, even if you've never done it before. "Folks stand in long lines waiting to shop at our pantry. Truthfully, we were a little surprised at how easy it was to collect and donate the food relative to its significant impact on these neighbors," Dan admitted. "First Presbyterian goes out of its way to make volunteering like this an easy path to follow – the path that our faith calls us to follow."

Learn more about this ministry on our website or scan the QR code. ♦





CHRISTMAS EVE SCHEDULE:

- Contemplative Service | 9 a.m.
- Children & Family Service | 11 a.m.
- Ivey Handbell Concert | 7:30 p.m.
- Candlelight Service | 8 p.m.
- Candlelight & Communion Service | 11 p.m.

Navigating Grief Amidst Holiday Cheer

FPC'S WHOLENESS AND HEALING SERVICE RETURNS

In a season when our culture insists that everything must be "merry and bright," the wholeness and healing service provides a space for those for whom the holidays are difficult or those who are grieving. It is a reflective candlelight service that incorporates comforting music, silence, and a short meditation. During the prayers, you can light a candle for the loved one you are missing or for other concerns you may be carrying that you want to lift to God.

"There is something holy about gathering with others facing similar griefs during the holiday season," Rev. Anna Dickson explained. "It is a reminder that you are not alone and that there are others who are clinging to the promise that God walks with us in the valleys of life."

The Service of Wholeness and Healing will be held on Thursday, December 21, at 6:30 p.m. in the sanctuary. "We hope people leave this service feeling comforted and with an assurance of God's presence." ♦

Dining with Gerald

FPC SESSION SERVES DINNER AT THE RISE

Operated by FPC's outreach partner, Roof Above, The Rise on Clanton provides permanent supportive housing for 77 individuals who have faced the challenges of chronic homelessness and bear the burden of medical disabilities. Individuals sign a lease and enjoy the same rights and obligations of tenancy

as their neighbors; however, tenants at The Rise pay no more than 30% of their income towards rent. This facility not only offers shelter but also strives to create a supportive community that fosters growth and healing.

In October, the FPC Session decided to do an outreach project together before their monthly meeting. The selected project: serve dinner and fellowship with residents at The Rise.

"As is so often the case, you get more out of an evening like that than you put into it," Session member Jeff Neikirk recalled. "I had the opportunity to share dinner with a resident named Gerald. It is incredible how the barriers and differences between people fade when you share a meal and some conversation."

Though the evening was short, the experience, the people, the moments, will remain in memories long after. Sometimes, the most meaningful are those found in simple acts of kindness and unexpected connections. ♦

Volunteers Shine at Westerly Hills Academy

FROM BLOCK PARTY TO WINTERFEST

Westerly Hills Academy shook off the autumn chill with the hottest event of the season: an inaugural Block Party! The party was a success thanks to the generous backing of Presbyterian Women's benevolence funds.



Beth Guinan, the PW Westerly Hills Academy Chair, helped mastermind the extravaganza and rolled up her sleeves to volunteer at the event. With enthusiasm, she shared, "The block party at Westerly Hills was a wonderful event! Principal Pride and her staff were so excited and worked hard to create a festive party, and our volunteers enjoyed decorating cars for trunk or treat and interacting with the students. Over 500 people attended – it was a great afternoon!"

A big "thank you" to the 26 volunteers who lent their talents to the cause – from face painting to trunk or treat, games, food, and the fierce costume contest, they made it all happen. Despite the temperatures hitting a balmy 80 degrees, the students donned their best costumes.

But the fun doesn't end there! We're gearing up for our next event as we announce Winterfest, a holiday extravaganza on December 19 from 4 to 6 p.m. Want to contribute to the fun? Scan the QR code to sign up to help make this holiday season unforgettable for our Westerly Hills families. ♦



ADVOCACY MINISTRY FOCUS

Climate Change Subcommittee

In his recent sermon on climate change, Pen called on us to look beyond the political divisions we face and the sense of helplessness we feel in addressing climate change. He challenged us to consider the issue using the lens of God's word, as found in the eighth Psalm. The psalm teaches us that "as human beings... we have a responsibility for creation's well-being...and that responsibility is primary...even above our own desires and self-interest."

The Climate Change subcommittee of First Presbyterian Church's Advocacy Committee invites you to join us as we seek to better understand climate change and its impacts on us and our neighbors in Charlotte and around the world. As Christ's followers, we can address this threat to the health of God's creation and the well-being of God's children. To learn more about this ministry, visit our webpage at firstpres-charlotte.org/advocacy/climate or scan the QR code. If you have questions or would like to join our group as we study and plan for a congregation-wide event next spring, please contact either co-chair via our website. ♦

